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Jean Fiorito, Executive Director

CT Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents

2189 Silas Deane Highway

Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Re: SB 353

Good morning, Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and honorable members of the Human Services Committee,

I am Executive Director of the CT Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents. Our agency supports, trains and advocates for foster, adoptive and relative caregiver parents in the State of CT. There are currently over 3000 foster families in the state.

I am in support of Senate Bill 353, An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights.

Foster parents need to be treated with respect and as trusted team members. They are the "backbone" of the child welfare system. This bill of rights, along with those bills already in place in sixteen other states (according to the National Association of Foster Parents), ensures that foster parents are treated well and have at their disposal the support services they need in order to nurture the children who are placed with them. While many of the items in this bill are already part of the Department of Children and Families' policies and procedures, it brings all foster parent rights into a single document as opposed to the current scattering of information. Foster parents should not be frustrated in their attempts to obtain information about the children and youth for whom they care and should be treated as full members of the children's treatment team. They must have the ability to ask questions without retaliation, and to get responses in a timely manner. They should not feel as though they are punished or disregarded because they are the children's advocates. The passage of this bill will promote foster parent esteem leading to greater satisfaction of foster parents. We know that there is always a need for foster parents; negative press plays a part in the hesitation of some prospective foster parents from making that call. This bill of rights will assist some in making that call as they will know that they can expect to be treated with respect and that their concerns will be heard.

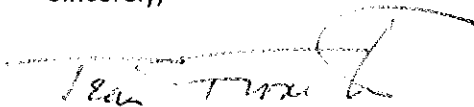
2008 Recipient of The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's *Angel in Adoption Award*

Proposed Right #12 in the bill refers to grievances being brought to the Superior Court. We have concerns court dockets may have more pressing issues than to hear this type of case and the remedy will not take place in a timely manner. We would suggest that the Administrative Hearing process of the Department of Children and Families could be an avenue to handle such grievances. It has been our experience that the Administrative Hearings Unit is a fair and unbiased unit in the many foster care issues which come before it. We would ask that this be a consideration with strict timelines enacted regarding hearings and decisions.

We urge passage of this bill to bring the respect and consideration that our foster parents deserve.

Thank you for your time and commitment to the human service needs of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jean Florito", with a stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Jean Florito

Executive Director